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ABSTRACT

This booklet summarizes research observations of the last 15 years about techniques and characteristics of effective teachers. The booklet presents information to assist teachers in the classroom, to stimulate discussion, and to promote effective approaches. Effective teaching cannot always be measured, yet effective teachers have a major effect on students' futures. Following reports in the mid-1960's that teachers could do little to change the influence of the home on students' achievement levels, researchers during the 1970's discovered that teachers and schools do in fact have substantial effects. The book briefly discusses 15 characteristics and techniques found among effective teachers, who, for the most part: (1) tend to be good managers, (2) use systematic instruction techniques, (3) have high expectations of students and themselves, (4) believe in their own efficacy, (5) vary teaching strategies, (6) handle discipline through prevention, (7) are caring, (8) are democratic in their approach, (9) are task-oriented, (10) are concerned with perceptual meanings rather than with facts and events, (11) are comfortable interacting with others, (12) have a strong grasp of subject matter, (13) are accessible to students outside of class, (14) tailor teaching to student needs, and (15) are flexible and imaginative. Thirty-five references, from which the summary is drawn, are appended. (CJH)

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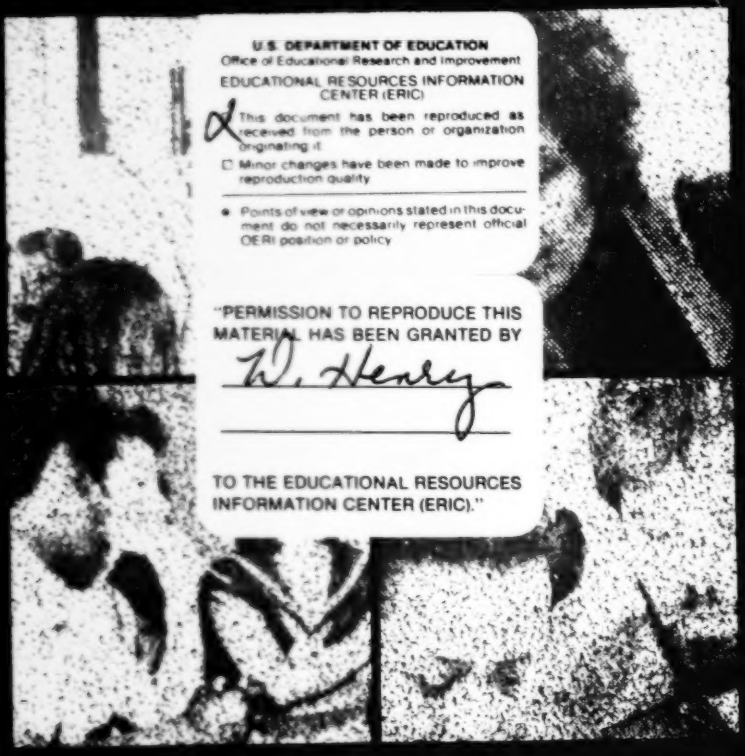

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

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WHY THIS PUBLICATION?

During the past several years, many researchers have observed the techniques and characteristics of effective teachers. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has summarized in this booklet a number of these observations. The purpose of this publication is to present information that can be helpful to teachers in the classroom, to stimulate discussion of significant research findings, and to promote a greater interest in approaches that will lead to more effective education for students.

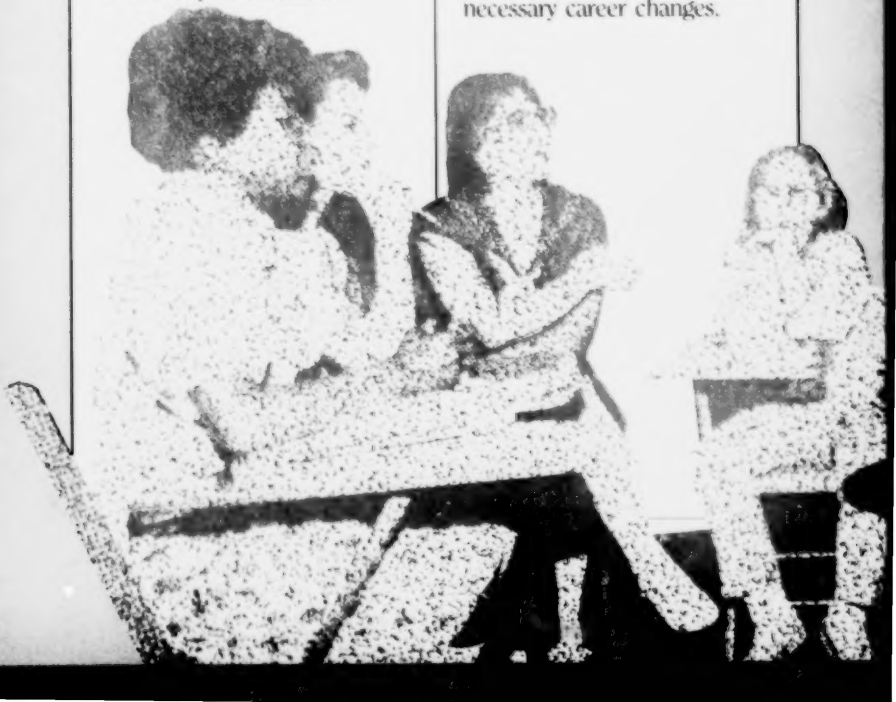
We encourage all educators to pay attention to research findings, discuss the findings, and apply the results when appropriate. On pages 14 through 16, we have listed additional reading materials. Information from these readings provided the base for much of the content in this publication. When a particular finding is associated with specific researchers' names, the names are cited in the text. If findings exist in many reports, there are not specific citations.

What makes a good teacher? What do good teachers do that makes them more effective in the classroom? Many of us can remember teachers who were so gifted that they profoundly affected our lives. Based on our experiences, we intuitively know the sort of teachers we want for our children. But what qualities, characteristics, or techniques make these teachers so superb?

Some educational researchers argue that good teachers are born; others insist that nearly anyone, properly trained, can be an effective teacher. Whatever the opinion, most would agree good teaching is an elusive skill that is not easy to measure.

MORE THAN A TEST

The goal of effective teaching is usually higher student achievement. In most school districts, student achievement is measured by standardized tests, but there is an additional, more intangible component to effective teaching that cannot be measured by a standardized test. Good teachers usually bolster students' self-esteem and spark a love of learning. That is an area hard to divine through pre- and post-tests. However, it's important today since education must be a lifelong process. Students whose teachers inspire in them a love of learning will always be ready to study a new field and make necessary career changes.



In this way effective teachers have a major impact on students' futures. It seems important, then, to define what techniques and characteristics make some teachers more effective than others.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Several reports published in the mid-60s were disheartening for educators. According to some researchers, what happened in a student's home was central to achievement levels, and nothing schools or teachers did could change that.

Photo: Project PRIDE

During the 1970s, many researchers set out to test that proposition. Their research confirmed that schools do indeed make a difference, especially schools with strong leadership, high expectations, and an orderly climate.

"The studies were all saying the same thing," says Jane Roberts of the Philadelphia-based Research for Better Schools Inc. "It was things like: If you believe students can succeed, if the teacher is well-organized, if what you want to teach really fits with the tests. . . if expectations are stated very clearly, if there are consistent rules and you assign homework regularly. . . then children will learn more. [Researchers were] saying things that intuitively made sense. . . but they did it in such a way that people could find sensible ways of putting them into practice."

A STARTING POINT

Effective Teaching reviews much of the positive research of the past 15 years that has identified what makes a teacher effective. Because much of the research is spread through volumes of reports, this publication is

designed to present in one place, many of the research findings rather than provide a complete report on each study. We hope it can serve as a catalyst for improvement or as the inspiration point for developing an effective teaching model. For teachers who are already making a difference in the classroom, it will perhaps serve to confirm their techniques and provide reinforcement.

The book's brief outline format lists factors that most researchers have identified as having a positive effect in the classroom. Not all good teachers will use every one of these techniques or exhibit every characteristic. Nor will all of these findings prove effective and/or appropriate in all classrooms. In fact, much of the research has focused on the elementary grades. Therefore, some of the findings will be more appropriate at some grade levels than others.

But researchers have identified many of the characteristics listed here as common to most effective teachers. Most of these characteristics seem to fall into two areas: management and instructional techniques, and personal characteristics. Effective teachers for the most part:

- *Tend to be good managers*
- *Use systematic instruction techniques*
- *Have high expectations of their students and themselves*
- *Believe in their own efficacy*
- *Vary teaching strategies*
- *Handle discipline through prevention*
- *Are usually warm and caring*
- *Are democratic in their approach*
- *Are task-oriented*
- *Are concerned with perceptual meanings rather than facts and events*
- *Are comfortable interacting with students*
- *Have a strong grasp of the subject matter*
- *Are readily accessible to students outside of class*
- *Tailor their teaching to student needs*
- *Are highly flexible, enthusiastic, and imaginative.*

MANAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTION

The Dynamics of Order

Beginning with Jacob Kounin in 1970, many researchers have focused on classroom management as an important component of effective teaching. A well-organized classroom, where a minimum of time is spent in maintaining discipline, making transitions between classes and repeating instructions, helps to increase the amount of time available for instruction and— ideally— the actual time spent learning. Up to a certain point, when learning time is used effectively student performance increases (Brophy, Fisher et al., Rosenshine and Berliner).

Although management and instruction are discussed separately, in practice the two are irrevocably intertwined. The key management elements—increasing the time available for learning, preventing disruptions, and keeping students profitably engaged in quality activities—are a vital part of effective teaching.

Effective classroom managers usually:

✓ Get off to a good start with substantial advance planning and organization before the school year gets underway. They develop a systematic approach that includes room arrangement—avoiding congestion in heavily used areas, ensuring chalkboard visibility for all students, setting aside assignment areas. These methods, along with others, ensure that students understand all routines and procedures.

✓ Strive for responsible, businesslike, systematic behavior. They maintain an orderly system for housekeeping duties—attendance, passes, announcements, and homework assignments. In addition, they set a consistent work schedule so students know what to expect and when. Time is not wasted on making a flurry of decisions about what to do next.

The Importance of Time

Researchers have found that average daily academic learning time—the actual time a student spends engaged in learning—is often less than two hours in the fifth grade, about 40 percent of in-class time. Effective teachers tend to average about 30 minutes more; ineffective teachers, about 30 minutes less. Studies have shown the use of time to be a complex subject because the amount of engaged time required for improving achievement is quite high and varies depending on the subject. In addition, there are times when adding to student engaged time can actually decrease achievement (Stallings and Kaskowitz, Rim et al.).

To increase the learning time, effective teachers frequently:

✔ Pay attention to how time is allocated among subject matter areas so that no area is slighted. Research indicates that allocated time is directly related to achievement (Fisher et al.).

✔ Arrange grouping situations with care. If each group member is assigned an active role vital to the completion of the group's task or project, then no one student's attention is likely to flag nor will certain students dominate (Webb, Brophy). Be careful in choosing grouping arrangements. For example, ability grouping tends to be effective in math and science but may be counterproductive in other instances. Furthermore, groups can be hard to manage, giving way to inattention and disruption when the teacher is busy elsewhere.

✔ Plan for smooth transitions between activities so time doesn't melt away (Billups, Brophy).

✔ Make sure rules and procedures are clearly stated and understood before the lesson begins to avoid having to repeat them (Rutter). Use

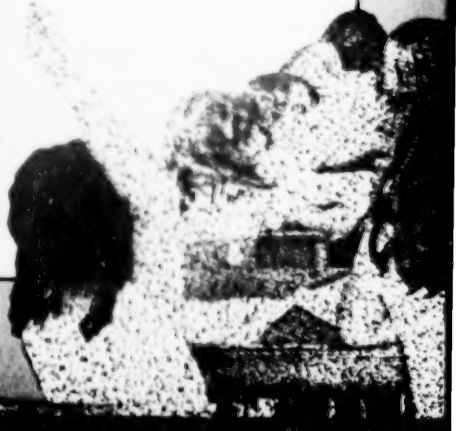


Photo: Jim Kalett/Photo Researchers

behavior reinforcement carefully.

✔ Set an appropriate pace. In some cases the more material a teacher covers, the greater percentage of it the students seem to learn, but teaching memory/basic skills usually requires a slower pace with drill and practice. Good teachers take these factors into account.

✔ Make it both interesting and challenging. Students who are bored aren't engaged in learning (Ryan).

✔ Ensure that students understand the lesson, especially when assigning seatwork. If students don't understand what they are to do or how to do it, the time can be wasted.

Disruption—Prevention Is the Key

To avoid disruptions, many effective teachers:

✔ Stay aware at all times of what's going on in the classroom so potential disruptions can be stopped early (Kounin).

✔ Become adept at doing more than one thing at a time. For example, they unobtrusively monitor the classroom while working with an individual student.

✔ Maintain a good momentum by being well prepared. Have all props ready. Deal with inattention in subtle ways—eye contact, calling on that student for the next

question, moving close to that student's desk—rather than disrupting the class by bringing too much attention to an inattentive or disruptive student.

✓ Keep the students alert and accountable by asking questions and varying techniques—such as interspersing choral responses with random selection or asking for volunteers.

✓ Investigate effective use of behavior modification techniques that are constructive and nonpunitive, such as self-monitoring, effective use—not overuse—of praise, modeling, individual counseling, and active listening. Many consider methods such as William Glasser's "reality therapy" techniques for more serious discipline problems (Brophy).

Art vs. Science

Effective teaching requires improvisation, spontaneity, and handling many forms, styles, and rhythms appropriate to the complex individual needs of all. It's akin to the old adage about keeping one's ear to the ground, shoulder to the wheel, and nose to the grindstone—and then trying to work in that position. There are so many variables on which effective teaching depends that many believe it's more an art than a science, a gift that one perhaps is born with and cannot be taught. The creativity and stamina of many teachers can inspire awe.

Yet, as researchers have observed teachers in the classroom, they found the more effective teachers exhibited common traits and techniques. Moreover, experiments have indicated "positive and substantial" results in changing teacher practices and thereby increasing student achievement (Gage).

Expectations

The most consistent finding in the majority of studies on school effectiveness has been the "crucial connection" between expectations and achievement. Good teachers not only motivate their students, organize the class, clarify the material, and provide illuminating generalizations, but they also project a "vision of excellence" (Cahn). Their expectations more often than not become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Photo: Douglas H. Clements

Teachers with high expectations:

✔ Believe in their own efficacy. If students aren't learning, good teachers look to themselves to find new teaching approaches: they do not try to blame student deficiencies nor look for other scapegoats (Brophy).

✔ Assign meaningful homework (Rutter).

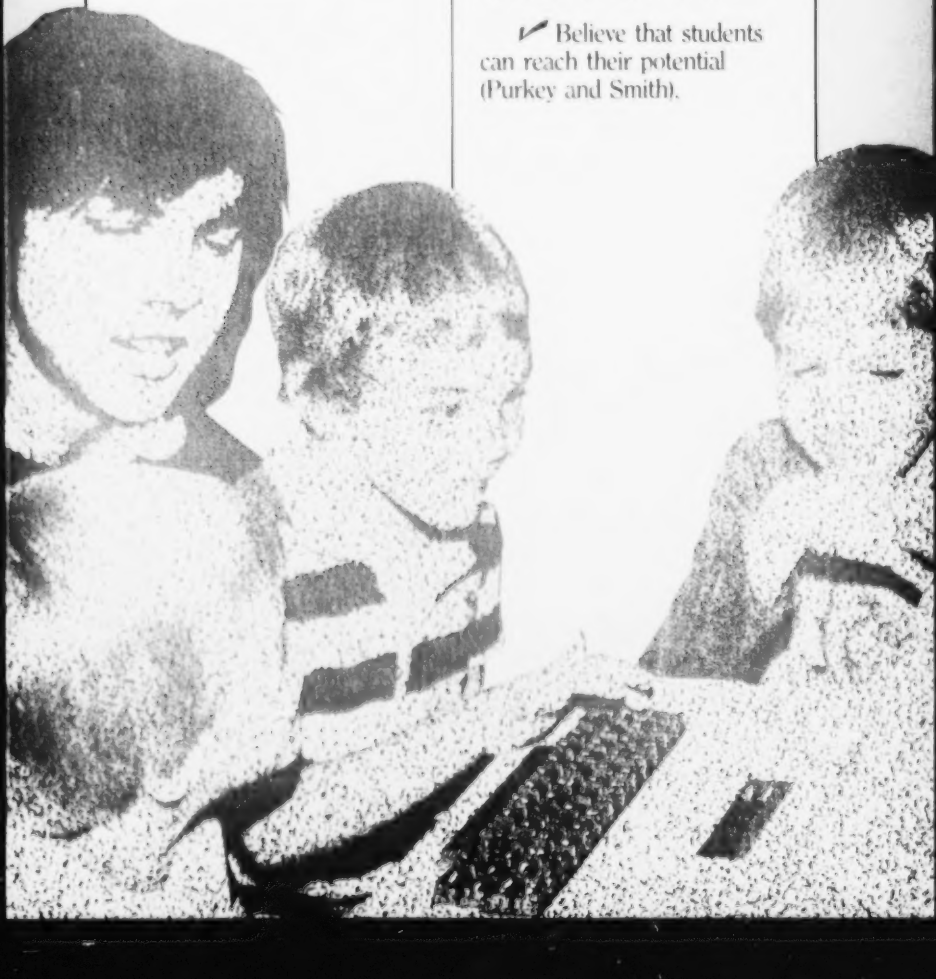
✔ Make students accountable for their learning (Rosenshine).

✔ Communicate objectives and teach directly to objectives (Rosenshine).

✔ Not only demand achievement, but provide opportunities for it (Farrar et al).

✔ Are readily available to students outside of class.

✔ Believe that students can reach their potential (Purkey and Smith).



Instruction

Researchers also found that effective teachers share many common instructional techniques that have stood the test of time. These are methods they use to present the information, rather than illustrations of how they perform on a more affective level.

Effective teachers may use a substantial repertoire of techniques, such as simulations, role playing, direct instruction when basic skills/memory are involved and more indirect, individualized instruction for other subject areas, active monitoring during seatwork, detailed presentation of material, independent practice, and student learning contracts.

Other methods researchers identified were:

- ✓ Systematic teaching steps that involve regular sequences of review, directed study, monitored seatwork, and relevant homework.
- ✓ Overlearning (Anderson, Evertson and Brophy)—a technique for teaching that ensures high success rates.

especially for younger students, in which teachers:

- —Structure the learning
- —Proceed in small but brisk steps
- —Give detailed instructions that are repeated
- —Provide many examples
- —Ask many questions and provide overt, active practice
- —Provide feedback and corrections
- —Monitor seatwork frequently
- —Allow for substantial practice so students have success rates of 90 to 100 percent.

✔ Techniques that foster higher level thinking and problem solving:

- —Regular checking for understanding (Webb)
- —Inquiry, rather than overlearning, methods in which the teacher systematically presents a variety of examples, asks questions in different ways, and assists students in developing hypotheses and then evaluates and analyzes them (Brophy, Redfield, and Rousseau)
- —Appropriate feedback and praise that is credible and spontaneous but not overdone (Brophy).

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

An individual's personality certainly is hard to quantify and harder yet to change. But researchers have determined that most effective teachers have caring, and quite often warm, personalities. They instinctively seem to know the right response for each individual student.

Effective teachers often exhibit:

✔ Objectivity (Billups)—they treat all students equally and fairly. Moreover, they remain nonjudgmental (of student differences, not behaviors)

✔ Active listening (Good)—they are fluent verbally, have a sense of humor, and can paraphrase student responses deftly to determine understanding and clarity.

Photo: Jerry McCoy

✔ Empathy, warmth (Ryan)—they show respect for students by being aware of and accepting of students' thoughts and feelings, and by being able to understand the reality of each student's perspective

✔ Motivation (Goodlad)—they are strongly committed to their work and to their students; they are goal-oriented, and they derive psychological rewards from teaching

✔ Student-centered style (Good, Schneider, others)—their concern is more for the student than the subject. As a result of their student-centered style, they usually:

—Are careful not to stereotype students
—Recognize effort and improvement, as well as superior achievement
—Plan for both the expected and the unexpected
—Model the behavior expected from the students
—Are skillful and enthusiastic
—Allow active involvement of students in the lessons and lesson plans
—Readily assess students needs and tailor teaching to the individual.

✔ Innovation with a zest for learning (Schneider)—Such teachers seek inservice and additional training opportunities and keep up-to-date not only in subject area but also in pedagogical methods. As N.L. Gage put it, "The evidence that knowledge of a subject is not enough to make a teacher is plain to anyone who has ever seen a Ph.D. in mathematics thoroughly confuse a freshman calculus class."

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM DOOR

Discussions of effective teaching are incomplete if they do not address the larger subject of effective schools. Effective teachers, after all, rarely exist in a vacuum, and what they are able to accomplish within the classroom is also affected by what goes on outside the classroom.

Schools that foster excellence and help support effective teaching tend to have:

✔ A strong sense of academic purpose

- A high level of professional collegiality among staff
- Recognition of personal and academic achievement on the part of both students and staff
- Academic priorities that are reflected through increased amounts of time allocated to teaching. For example, there are fewer disruptions via the public address sytem, student activities, required paperwork, and so on
- A strong sense of school spirit
- Strong instructional leadership by individual administrators, usually the principal, who communicate high expectations for staff and students and who have well-defined instructional objectives (Roueche and Baker)
- A safe, orderly school atmosphere
- Regular inservice opportunities for staff (Smith and Purkey)
- Community support
- Staff stability.

NEW AND EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES ARE UP TO YOU

Clearly, effective teaching depends on the knowledge, techniques, and creativity of people who are dedicated to helping students learn. Most of the studies referred to in this publication are correlational; they reflect observations of what goes on in effective classrooms. For that very reason, though, they are valuable for all teachers. Many of these observations and findings come directly from the classroom. They are tailormade by teachers and for teachers. They represent what effective teachers actually do.

This booklet is only a beginning. Effective teachers, applying their talents in schools everywhere, will continue to develop new techniques and will continue to share those techniques with each other as they have in the past.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

The points discussed in this book were obtained from material in this list of readings. We recommend this list to those who wish to study this topic in more depth.

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